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ABSTRACT

Changes in textbook adoption policies in three states--North Carolina, Texas, and California--are examined in this paper, which analyzes major legislative or regulatory changes in the context of each state's educational improvement efforts. Findings indicate a growing conflict between advocates for statewide versus local responsibility for textbook selection. In North Carolina, state education officials have professionalized textbook selection in a top-down system, while the legislature has created a parallel system that works on an opposing principle--waivers from all state laws and regulations. Textbook selection in Texas has been democratized by placing teacher majorities on state "proclamation" and textbook selection committees. In California, the legislature has mandated a rolling adoption procedure that democratizes textbook selection and reduces political controversy. Although each state has maintained control over textbook adoption, legislatures have forced state agencies to share some decision-making responsibility with those who question the feasibility of statewide adoption. (LMI)

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THREE PORTRAITS:

TEXT BOOK ADOPTION POLICY CHANGES IN NORTH CAROLINA TEXAS CALIFORNIA

An Occasional Paper

by

Harriet Tyson

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The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) is a Washington-based nonprofit organization dedicated to collaborative problem-solving strategies for education. IEL works at the national, state, and local levels to bring together people from all sectors of society in a new coalition to support essential change in schools and to enable all children to achieve school success. IEL works to develop the ideas, leadership, resources, and programs that will enable American education to meet the critical challenges it faces. IEL has four primary components that drive its work.

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THREE PORTRAITS:

TEXT BOOK ADOPTION POLICY CHANGES IN
NORTH CAROLINA
TEXAS
CALIFORNIA

An Occasional Paper

by

Harriet Tyson

The Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc.
July 1990

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PREFACE

In 1988, the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) assisted with the dissemination of "A Conspiracy of Good Intentions: America's Textbook Fiasco" by Harriet Tyson. In the foreword to that book, William S. Woodside, Chairman of the Board of IEL, stated "if education reform is to be sustained a compelling case can be made that the salient issue of text-book reform can no longer be ignored.....we must develop broad-based support for strategies that will improve the quality of textbooks, the fundamental teaching tool which so vitally influences the instructional process."

IEL asked Ms. Tyson to develop this occasional paper as a follow-up to her book to examine recent textbook adoption policy changes in three major state adoption jurisdictions. It is our hope that this paper will help state and local policy makers to more fully understand the complexity of textbook adoption policy and its important relationship to the broader processes of reform and improvement. This remains a singularly ignored and unexamined, yet vital, realm of educational policy.

Michael Usdan
President

Martin J. Blank
Senior Associate

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THREE PORTRAITS:
TEXTBOOK ADOPTION POLICY CHANGES IN NORTH CAROLINA, TEXAS, AND CALIFORNIA

By Harriet Tyson

INTRODUCTION

In April of 1988, Tyson's book, "A Conspiracy of Good Intentions: America's Textbook Fiasco," was released at the annual convention of the Education Writers Association. At least a few education writers went home with renewed interest in the issue. Some reporters examined the textbooks adopted in their states, comparing the choices of their state textbook committees to those of various groups in the nation that study textbook quality. Others wrote stories about the vagaries of textbook politics in their home states. Still others investigated instances of corruption and conflict of interest in the marketing and purchasing of textbooks.

Also, the Institute for Educational Leadership, with a grant from the Lounsberry Foundation, supported the distribution of "A Conspiracy of Good Intentions" to chief state school officers, members of state boards of education and, in some cases, members of state textbook adoption committees. The grant also supported Tyson's attendance at a number of IEL-sponsored State Education Policy Seminars, where state board members, key legislators, and governor's aides discussed textbook quality and the textbook selection system.

The ferment generated by the book, by the education press, and by policy makers' anxiety about the condition of American education, prompted some states to reexamine their approach to textbook adoption. In the three most influential "adoption states"---North Carolina, Texas, and California-- there have been major legislative or regulatory changes, and more are in the offing. In this occasional paper, Tyson examines those changes in the context of each state's efforts to improve its educational system.

It is too soon to draw any grand or general conclusions from these three case studies. The incubation of a textbook takes several years, and publishers are cautious. We will not know for many years whether the policy changes in these three influential states will result in books that help students learn better, or whether the selection process in each state will result in the purchase of books that make sense to students, and that they enjoy reading.

It is not too soon, though, to conclude that the system of state-wide textbook adoption that has prevailed in 22 states since the turn of the century is beginning to break apart. There is a growing tension between those who believe that a state-level system is best equipped to select textbooks that support the state curriculum and testing program, and those who believe that decisions about materials are best made by those closest to the students.

In North Carolina, state education officials have tried to make a top-down system work better by professionalizing textbook selection, while the legislature has created a parallel system which works on an opposing principle---waivers from all state laws and regulations. In Texas, one determined legislator spearheaded a successful effort to democratize textbook selection by putting teacher majorities on state "proclamation" committees and textbook selection committees. In California, the legislature passed a bill which not only makes textbook selection more democratic, but also tries to take some of the political heat out of California's increasingly raucous textbook adoption contests. Although each state maintained control over textbook adoption, it is clear that legislatures have forced state agencies to yield some ground to those who believe that state-wide adoption is an inherently flawed system.

A MINI-REFORM IN NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina's leaders have recently made some small, hesitant moves toward reforming a textbook selection process that had not changed very much since the turn of the century. These changes boiled up from a political stew with several powerful ingredients. First, there was a thoughtful and enterprising education reporter hammering away at the selection process and the books themselves, and digging up corruption scandals that unnerved state political and school officials. Second, there was a broad-based interest in curriculum and textbooks that reflect, rather than avoid, the role that religion has played in history. Third, there was growing anxiety about low academic achievement and high drop-out rates, especially in North Carolina's rural counties. The latest crop of SAT scores showed North Carolina in 50th place among the states, an event which has turned anxiety into desperation. Fourth, the North Carolina Educational Forum, a prestigious group of political, educational, and business leaders, began to push educational policy in a new direction--toward decentralized decision-making and the radical restructuring of schools. Finally, there was--and is--an undercurrent of political, as well as policy conflict between the newly elected State Superintendent, a Democrat, and the Republican Governor and his appointees to the State Board of Education.

The emerging picture is of a state pulling in two directions at once. As the textbook adoption apparatus becomes a more rigorous exercise of top-down control over curriculum, textbooks, and testing, the state legislature is moving the state educational system toward local autonomy--in exchange for accountability for results.

A Board appointed committee in charge of improving textbook selection has replaced a chaotic system, in which hundreds of unpaid, untrained, and sometimes anonymous teachers and administrators rated the books, with a system in which 80 trained and paid educators will rate the books. Before and after the recent changes, the main thrust of North Carolina's textbook policy has been to call for, and select books that closely matched the state's highly detailed curricular and testing specification. The new system can be expected to accomplish that goal more efficiently.

At the same time, the legislature and the newly elected state superintendent are moving toward a reduction of centralized bureaucracy and expanding opportunities for local school systems to make their own decisions, including decisions about textbooks.

A Smart Reporter on the Textbook Case

In North Carolina, Bill Graves of the Raleigh News & Observer, a relentless journalist with a tolerance for reading textbooks, has been a major force in bringing out changes in the textbook adoption system. In 1978, he filed a series of articles about history textbooks, reporting that the U.S. History textbooks ranked highest by North Carolina State Board of Education were roundly criticized by two national study groups.

The state's top-rated book was "Triumph of the American Nation (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich). A study commissioned by the Educational Excellence Network, a group with strong ties to conservatives, described the book as shallow, dull, and trying to cover too many topics. The Network study also faulted North Carolina's second-ranked book, "The United States: A History of the Republic" (Prentice Hall), for a "cheerleading style that flatters and panders."

A book that didn't make the North Carolina list, "A History of the United States" (Ginn and Co.), was the top choice of the Educational Excellence Network's panel of six historians, two journalists, two editors, and two teachers. They described "A History of the United States" as "the most literate and effective narrative of the 11th grade books surveyed." The same book received the highest rating in a study conducted by People for the American Way, a liberal lobbying group in Washington, D.C.

In April of 1988, Graves filed another story that showed how effortlessly state board members had influenced textbook content. Back in 1966, during a history textbook adoption, a casual complaint by a Board member who was a local history buff led first one publisher, and then all publishers, to give more space to an obscure Revolutionary war battle than to the Constitutional Convention or the Boston Tea Party--a circumstance that has persisted into recent editions of U.S. history textbooks.

When Graves interviewed North Carolina's Textbook Commissioners about these matters, he found them stolidly repeating their long-held belief that "the best books rise to the top." In North Carolina, as elsewhere, the "best books" are those that conform to state curricular objectives (137 in the case of U.S. history), while People for the American Way and the Excellence Network favored books with a lively narrative, a point of view, depth, and coherence. The strong contrast in rankings between North Carolina's state adoption process and the studies conducted by outsiders can be explained by dramatically different notions of what constitutes a "good book." Books lauded by the textbook selectors were frequently so compressed that students, and even adults, often found the material unintelligible. Graves' stories contained excerpt upon excerpt that brought his point home: the state was buying books that were often confusing, sometimes badly written, and nearly always boring.

Graves was puzzled by the fact that outsiders roundly criticized books that insiders thought were excellent. He started poking around to find out why. In June 1988, the Raleigh News and Observer published his series of articles about cozy dealings between state officials and publishers---dealings that might make state textbook officials less prone to take a hard, critical look at the products they were buying.

The state superintendent had reportedly accepted large honoraria to talk with executives in various publishing houses. Also, state agency officials had asked publishers and other vendors to pay for dinners, cocktails, ice cream, motor speedway rides, and lunch for the children of state and local administrators attending the State Superintendent's Summer Leadership Conference in June of 1988. The publishers, who were in no position to identify themselves publicly, told Graves that North Carolina's officials "had crossed the bounds of good judgment by soliciting sponsors."

In the wake of the conflict-of-interest stories, several important changes occurred. An investigation by State Auditor Ed Renfrow (another elected official) turned up further--though relatively minor--transgressions by agency staff. Both Democrats and Republicans on the State Board moved quickly to tighten the conflict-of-interest rules, zealously removing the perks that the State Board, the State Textbook Commission, and local school officials had long enjoyed. For reasons that were probably unrelated to the conflict-of-interest controversy, the state superintendent, a Democrat who had held the post for 20 years, declined to run for re-election. Thus the stage was set for a change of leadership--and direction--in North Carolina.

A Change of Leadership and a Move Toward Decentralization

According to observers, the Democrats were determined to keep the State Superintendency in Democratic hands. Members of the legislature vigorously campaigned for one of their own, Bobby Ethridge, a member of N.C. General Assembly who has been active in educational reform legislation. One of his campaign planks was to slim down the state education bureaucracy, and he won handily over a relatively unknown Republican candidate.

While serving in the Assembly, Ethridge had been active in the influential Public School Forum of North Carolina, which supports fundamental school restructuring. Ethridge had supported legislation which established pilot programs in three school districts. The program provided incentives to the three districts to experiment with career ladder and "lead teacher" programs, and granted them waivers from state regulations. The pilot sites produced such stunning results that the legislature, in Senate Bill 2, subsequently gave the State Superintendent authorization to expand the waiver program.

At the Toler-Oak Hill school in Granville County, for example, only 38 percent of the sixth graders scored at a mastery level on the state writing test three years ago. Last year, 80 percent of them, as eighth-graders, scored at or above that level--the result of an intensive writing program across the district. Superintendent Houlihan also implemented a school model imported from the Koln-Holweide school in Germany (he heard about it from reporter Bill Graves). The model, which has been highly successful with alienated Turkish guest-worker children in Germany, creates long-lasting, familial groupings of teachers and students. Such a model would have been impossible in North Carolina without a waiver from the state's rigid certification standards.

In Granville County's high school, the science faculty found state-approved high school science books unsatisfactory. Houlihan asked permission to buy other books and, though initially refused by the State Textbook Commission, he ultimately gained permission from the new state superintendent.

As State Superintendent, Ethridge is encouraging the expansion of the restructuring movement. Although he sees the incongruity of mandating local freedom from the top, he also sees that local schools will not have the authority to restructure unless the state changes its rules on spending, class size, and textbooks. The creativity and demonstrated success of the Granville County experiment has brought into sharp focus the tension between the top-down, heavily regulated approach and the new move toward decentralized decision-making.

Strengthening a Centralized Textbook System

Meanwhile, the State Board of Education, led by Howard H. Haworth, a Republican appointed by Gov. James Martin, has been moving in the opposite direction. The State Board's Task Force on the Textbook Adoption Process, headed by Dr. Barbara Tapscott, Vice-Chairman of the State Board, believed that the system needed to change "because there was no consistency in the judgments of the hundreds of persons involved in reading the books." To Tapscott, the inconsistent results suggested that some readers were picking books more on the basis of the free "extras" publishers use to promote sales, and less on the basis of their value to students.

Tapscott's concerns were echoed in articles by Graves in the News & Observer. "Book salesmen put a heavy emphasis on free extras in their pitches at regional conferences this year," wrote Graves. Teachers interviewed by Graves reported a great interest in these extras, as well as graphics, and one administrator said that teachers are "so overwhelmed by these extra things that the book's content is not scrutinized."

The new Chairman of the State Textbook Commission, Dr. Nancy Davis, thinks otherwise. "People don't give teachers enough credit for their intelligence," says Davis. "Teachers know they will be stuck with the book for five years, so they are careful to choose books that help their students." An audit of the state's textbook adoption process should shed some light on whether "freebies" or merit is the more powerful influence on textbook choices. State Auditor Ed Renfrow has organized a computerized analysis of purchasing patterns in an effort to find out why some books are best sellers in some regions, but get few buyers in others.

The Task Force on the Textbook Adoption Process recommended measures to make the existing system more efficient and professional, and most of their recommendations are already being implemented. At the front end of the process, the State Superintendent will appoint a Curriculum Review Committee which will recommend changes in the curriculum and give advice on the criteria to be included in the "call letter" to the publishers, and develop evaluation checklists. The checklists will be submitted to the State Board for approval. The Committee's main responsibility is to ensure that textbooks "are evaluated as to their conformity to the Standard Course of Study and the Competency Based Curriculum."

A new state system of end-of-course subject-matter tests for high school students has added fresh impetus to the goal of seeking a close match between the books and the state's curriculum and testing program. Dr. Nancy Davis, the newly appointed chairman of the State Textbook Adoption Commission, maintains that teachers teach the curriculum, not the textbooks. She nevertheless supports the idea of a close match. "It would be unfair to test students on material to which they had not been exposed," said Davis.

The new textbook adoption schedule will give publishers only five months to produce books that reflect North Carolina's demands--clearly an impossible mission. When asked about the time schedule, Tapscott said the Task Force established its time schedule in order to secure funding from the legislature. She predicts that the schedule will change in the future to give publishers enough time to take the state's demands into account.

Each of the State Textbook Commission members will appoint 10 reviewers, intended to be expert curriculum specialists and teachers. The 80 reviewers will gather in Raleigh to be trained in textbook evaluation by state agency specialists.

These changes are progressive when compared to the system that has endured, with minor modifications, since 1901. Yet the state has stopped short of creating subject matter committees that would bring a concentrated dose of expertise to bear on a particular adoption. Since the state adopts several categories of books each year, the Regional Textbook Committees of 10 will be composed of teachers representing several specialties (for example, agriculture, English literature, and health in one year). Although the agriculture specialists on the committees won't be rating literature textbooks, or vice versa, there will still be only a few people assigned to any one subject, and they will be working in isolation from others around the state who are evaluating the same set of books. However, the new plan permits outside experts, such as content-area scholars from universities, to be part of the review process.

While some other adoption states have opened up opportunities for local districts to choose off-list books, North Carolina intends to hold to the practice of requiring local school systems not in the waiver programs to use only state-approved books.

Interviews with former and current members of the Textbook Commission reveal an emphatic belief in the virtues of statewide adoption. They do not think local educators have the time or expertise to choose the best textbooks, but at the same time, they emphasize the importance of staffing selection panels with local educators. They believe that local selection would be an "administrative nightmare," with salesmen from all the companies swarming through local school districts, even though they are aware that school districts in more than half of the states pick their own books.

Although leaders in many other Southern states justify statewide adoption on the ground that local systems would succumb to pressures from Fundamentalists, none of the principal actors in North Carolina offered that justification for state-wide adoption. John Dornan, Executive Director of the North Carolina Education Forum, described North Carolina's administrators as "almost courageous" in defending academic integrity.

One idea emerging from the Task Force on Textbook Adoption would take the state even beyond tight state-wide control to mega-state control. There is interest in exploring a regional compact with other Southern states in order to maximize Southern influence over textbook publishers, rather than allowing Texas and California to dominate the scene.

Former Textbook Commission chairman Jim Ellerbe said he didn't think the several states will agree to a common curriculum, but believes that a regional coalition of states could demand books that were "better written." Tapscott echoed that hope, saying "the way they're written is very important."

It is not clear whether North Carolina's textbook adoption officials perceive the connection between bad writing and their insistence on curricular matching. Scholars in the field, as well as the publishers themselves, point to the cause-and-effect relationship between state demands and the frequently elliptical and confusing treatment of topics in the books. There is simply not enough space in the book to cover the detailed knowledge and skill requirements of so many states, and at the same time, to write engagingly, and in sufficient depth, about any one topic.

As the adoption states have tried to increase their influence over textbooks relative to other adoption states, and systematized their methods of checking for congruence, the books have become more crammed with test-oriented details on the fringes of the curriculum, and as a result, less interesting, coherent, and memorable.

The Beginning of the End of the System?

John Dornan of the North Carolina Education Forum sees the new end-of-course tests as the "fastest driven move toward state centralization" in a decade of increasingly centralized controls. But the success of Granville County's restructuring experiment is causing many educators to think twice about the effectiveness of top-down reforms. "Centralization has reached its outer limits in North Carolina," says Dornan. He believes that more school systems, especially those that are deeply troubled by their inability to motivate students, are going to apply for waivers under Senate Bill 2. "Senate Bill 2," says Dornan, "is a primal scream against the excesses of standardization and centralization."

Dornan's prediction is coming true. As of January, 1990, every county in North Carolina had applied for the waiver program. North Carolina's dual system, one that operates under tight rules and prescriptions, and another that encourages ingenuity and innovation, has the potential to become an entirely different kind of system. If school systems operating under waivers produce results that even come close to those achieved in Granville County, the contradictions inherent in statewide textbook adoption could become increasingly apparent.

Those inherent contradictions can be seen even in the most recent round of textbook adoptions. The N.C. Textbook Commission scrutinized books more diligently than in the past, and even engaged in debate--a rarity, according to reporter Bill Graves. Nevertheless, it adopted nearly all of the books submitted in order to "leave as much local option as possible," according to William Hudson, a member of the Commission. In so doing, the Commission seems to acknowledge tacitly that local educators are capable of making choices.

In October of 1989, the North Carolina Commission recommended agriculture books it thought were out of date, and English books with a paucity of literary selections and writing exercises--books intended for low-level students who are most in need of help with reading and writing. The Commission made these compromises so that teachers (no mention of students) would not be left without books. However practical, these compromises remove the system's main justification--that state-level expertise should be used to protect schools from inferior books.

As more and more local N.C. school districts enter the waiver program, and as they become more adept at exercising their new-found freedom, it seems inevitable that they will reject the pedestrian, overstuffed books selected by state officials and seek out books (including trade books) that give students a sense of the patterns and connections within subjects, and that students will voluntarily read. In its choice of science books, Granville County has already done exactly that.

IN TEXAS: ALMOST A ONE-MAN CRUSADE

Although Texas is best known for its legendary power over textbook content and for spectacular, news-making clashes between the Gablers (the fabled Fundamentalist textbook critics) and People for the American Way (the well-financed defenders of First Amendment freedoms and cosmopolitan values), the spotlight has now shifted. For the past two years, the central figure in Texas textbook policy has become Representative Bill Hammond of Dallas, a Republican member of the Texas House of Representatives now serving his 4th term in office.

Hammond became interested in textbooks when his wife, a volunteer at the local elementary school, read the basal readers selected by the state and described them as "Slurpee textbooks--all sugar and no protein." Hammond organized an independent examination of state-approved textbooks, and the results convinced him that the textbooks for elementary children lacked literary qualities, failed to promote good values, and were generally bland and boring. "The publishers do what we tell them to do, and whatever we are telling them is wrong."

In the last two session of the legislature, Hammond has introduced bills that would loosen up the system. His ultimate goal is to get rid of state-wide adoption and allowing local school districts to pick their own books. "We let them hire their own teachers," says Hammond, "so why shouldn't we let them choose their own books?"

But Texas has a long tradition of centralized state control and regulation, and the forces arrayed against local textbook adoption are formidable. Publishers complain about state adoption privately, but most of them know how to work the system and are comfortable with it. Lobbyists across the political spectrum support statewide adoption because they believe they are having a beneficial impact on textbook content--an impact that would be far more difficult to achieve if they had to operate in 1063 school districts. With few exceptions (noted later), lobbyists for teacher and administrator organizations also support statewide adoption. And state agency leaders, like their counterparts in other adoption states, are confident that their exercise of power over textbook specifications and selection is beneficial. Nevertheless, Hammond has been chipping away at a system he believes to be responsible for expensive, poorly written, unmotivating textbooks.

Hammond's first move was in the 1987 session. He introduced a bill in the house permitting local textbook selection, which passed by a vote of 80-60, taking the publishers by surprise. But the Senate killed the bill after the publishers mobilized their counter-attack. He was successful, however, in a move to expand the number of books on the state list from five to eight. Although the Association of American Publishers supported the move, some of their members didn't. The largest publishers, who know how to play the Texas game, opposed the expansion. They argued that any one company's market share would be too small to compensate for the enormous costs of doing business in Texas. Those costs include millions of dollars worth of free samples, maintaining textbook

depositories in the state, the year-round salaries of on-site salesmen and lobbyists, and the provision of Spanish editions in basic subjects (required by the state, but often spurned by local districts). But smaller companies seeking a foothold in the Texas market supported the bill, along with many educators who wanted to select from a wider range of choices, supported the change and it passed. (Subsequent events suggest that expanding the list was a hollow victory. The number of companies surviving the recent round of takeovers is down to six, and even some of those have declined to enter the Texas competition.)

In 1988, the Texas Education Code came up for review under a sunset law. The Sunset Advisory Commission's report was intended to serve as a basis for reforms in the 1989 session of the legislature. With Hammond as a major player, the Commission sought ways to inject more competition into the textbook system, to control costs, and to raise the level of expertise applied to the selection process--with mixed results.

Publishers Trim the Sails of Sunset Advisory Commission

One of the Sunset Advisory Commission's more radical ideas (by Texas standards) was to permit local districts to use a portion of state textbook funds to buy books of their own choosing. But Joe Bill Watkins, a Vinson & Elkins attorney representing the Association of American Publishers, persuaded key legislators to oppose the idea. With impeccable logic, Watkins argued that his clients would have little incentive to jump through the hoops of the adoption contest if they could avoid all the risk and hassle by simply selling their books to local school districts. The Sunset Commission retreated to a milder recommendation that districts, on a limited basis, be allowed to obtain waivers from having to use the state books, but even that one didn't survive the 1989 session. Thwarted in its effort to use market mechanisms to raise quality and reduce costs, the Sunset Advisory Commission then came up with the idea of regulating cost directly. Ginny McKay, a staffer for the Commission, was troubled by the fact that price was not a factor in textbook adoption at either the state or local level.

On the theory that the exclusion of cost from consideration enhances the selection of the highest quality textbooks, Texas has no competitive bidding process at the state level. McKay also discovered that there was no price competition at the local level. The other 21 adoption systems, but not Texas, give local districts a fixed allocation of funds or credits, and thus local districts have to pay attention to price, and so do the publishers. The staff report to the Sunset Advisory Commission concluded that there is "no systematic means for keeping the price of textbooks from rising well in excess of the rate of inflation," and recommended, among other things, that the Texas Education Agency set price limitations after it received bids from publishers, but before books were considered by the textbook committees.

The publishers howled, arguing that Texas was primarily to blame for rising textbook costs because of, (1) the state's insistence on books written especially for Texas, (2) its demand for fully-finished review copies, rather than manuscripts, (3) the high cost of making state-required revisions after the printing plates were in finished form, (4) its insistence on Spanish editions, which are unprofitable because few districts buy them, and (5) local school

district insistence that publishers provide "freebies" and extras, which drives up the cost of the basic textbooks. It would be unfair, said the AAP, to tell a publisher his book was too expensive after he had already developed the product according to state demands and local market desires (read "freebies). By the time the cost control provisions reached the legislature, they were considerably watered down.

Hammond didn't get much of what he wanted out of the Sunset report, so in the 1989 legislative session he introduced a number of bills designed to stimulate debate and shake up the system. He tried a local selection bill again, and a modified local selection bill, but got too much opposition from state adoption supporters. He tried again to expand the number of books on the state list (from eight to 15) but was beaten back by the publishers.

The Plain Brown Wrapper

Aware that textbooks are often chosen because reviewers like their covers, or their publishers, Hammond crafted a provision in one of his many bills that required publishers to deliver their books to State Textbook Review Committees in plain brown wrappers. Graphics that directly supported the text, such as maps, charts, and graphs, could be included in review copies, but pictures would be banned from the review process. The idea was to prevent reviewers from knowing the publisher's identity, and to encourage them to read the words rather than flip through the pictures. Publishers, of course, hated the idea since covers and pictures are known to sell the books. The same publishers who had previously blamed rising costs on the state's insistence on finished review copies now wailed about the cost of printing a separate set of books without their fancy covers and abundant pictures in four-color bleed. Their wails got a sympathetic response from business-minded legislators, and the brown wrapper ended up in the trash basket.

The New Texas Textbook Law: H.B. 884

Hammond did succeed, however, in getting the legislature to pass a bill that will make textbook selection in Texas more professional. Starting this year, the Texas Educational Agency (TEA) will enhance the process for developing "proclamations" (Texan for announcements to publishers about textbook specifications based on the curriculum) by appointing advisory committees composed of subject area experts. Thirty-two months in advance of the due date for textbook submissions, the Proclamation Committees (with a required majority of teachers) will recommend to the State Board specifications for textbook publishers. This provision gives publishers a realistic amount of time to develop books that meet the state's requirements.

In the previous system, the State Textbook Committee was composed of people from various subject areas who reviewed and evaluated books for a wide variety of disciplines. The new system requires a series of independent subject-matter committees which have teacher majorities, and which include outside experts in the subject area under consideration. Under the new system, adoption shall be arranged so that not more than one of the elementary level basal subjects of reading, mathematics, language arts, science, and social studies, expires in any one adoption year.

Because there have been persistent rumors of corruption and conflict of interest, H.B 884 also includes stringent limitations on the contacts between reviewers and publishers, disallows the participation of persons (or their spouses) who have received benefits from publishers during the two preceding years, and forbids those who serve on textbook adoption committees from working for publishers for two years following their service. By moving to subject matter committees, by including outside experts (the expert review of content for its accuracy has been a missing piece in most textbook adoptions around the nation), and by giving publishers adequate notice (probably the most significant move), the Texas plan moves much further in the direction of professionalization than does North Carolina's plan.

Let Austin Do It (And Pay)

But Texas, unlike North Carolina, does not seem to be flirting with decentralization; most educational and political leaders seem to support statewide control over many aspects of education, and would prefer to let the State Board and Texas Educational Agency take the political risks associated with textbooks as long as the state pays for them. There are a few exceptions: the Texas Federation of Teachers supported Hammond's move toward local control, and so did the Texas School Boards Association--somewhat reluctantly. Margaret LaMontagne, the Association's Austin representative, said that textbooks were not at the forefront of board members' interest and acknowledged their reluctance to take on more political pressures.

The Gabler Factor: Reality or Excuse?

Most of the people I interviewed about the effects of local textbook adoption expressed the fear that the Gablers (and other similar organizations) would terrorize local school officials and influence their decisions about science, history, literature, and health textbooks. Even Bill Hammond acknowledges that the Fundamentalists are "a factor to be considered." For that reason, when Hammond was trying to gather political support for local adoption, he tried to negotiate a compromise: maintain state responsibility for science textbook adoption. But even that concession failed to produce enough supporters.

The most ardent opponent of local selection is Elizabeth Judge. She heads Broader Perspectives, Inc., a Houston-based organization that organizes professional reviews of textbooks under consideration by the state and reports its findings to state authorities. She thinks that Hammond is "mistaken in believing that local districts would make better choices." "If you think beyond the immediate problems," says Judge, "you will see that the districts will choose books that avoid controversy." Judge tracked the sales of biology and health books at the local level, finding that a biology book on the state list that ignored evolution outsold the other books, and that a health book silent on birth control outsold health books that discussed the issue. Mike Hudson, the seasoned representative of People for the American Way in Texas, has been doing battle with the Fundamentalists for nearly a decade. Hudson says that there is "much to be said" on both sides of the state adoption system. He acknowledges that state adoption authorities have yielded to Creationists, thus contaminating science books for the entire state. At the same time, Hudson notes that the

religious right has a communication network through local Fundamentalist churches. He estimates that a tenth of the 1063 school districts would be influenced by local outposts of the Gablers and other state-wide groups. Whether adoption decisions are made at the state or local level, Hudson warns that "the far right is organized in greater numbers now, so the battle over textbooks isn't over."

Steven D. Schaffersman, President of the Texas Council for Science Education, has had recent and painful experience with the Gablers' power to influence events. Schaffersman and other Texas scientists helped the TEA craft a proclamation for biology textbooks that met scientific standards. But in March of 1989, the State Board retreated into ambiguous wording (both sides now claim a victory) in the wake of an epistolary onslaught from the Gablers' disciples. Because of, or in spite of, that, Schaffersman is ambivalent about statewide textbook adoption. He fears Fundamentalist influence over state-wide policies, but he also fears textbook selection by local school boards.

With characteristic bluntness, Hammond says, "What's to fear? It's already happened." In Hammond's view, local school districts couldn't do any worse than the state has already done when it comes to compromising science.

Schaffersman would give teachers, not local school boards, the power to choose textbooks because he thinks the vast majority of teachers would select scientifically valid books. Noting that American students are at the absolute bottom of international comparisons of achievement of biology, he would rather see a critical mass of students reading good science materials than see all Texas students reading materials compromised by state or local political pressures.

Walter Hinojosa, Legislative Director for the Texas Federation of Teachers and a former economics teacher in Houston, also thinks that teachers should choose textbooks because teachers know their students better than a distant politician. His firsthand observations tell him that when a small group--whether at the state or local level--decides which textbooks to buy, the deciders are apt to be more influenced by perks and freebies than by the educational merits of the books.

Cracks in the System?

Hammond has not achieved his goal of ending statewide adoption in Texas, and he has declined to run for re-election. Nevertheless, his efforts seem destined to have a long-term impact on the state. Even though the adoption system in Texas is highly developed, broadly supported, and often admired, Hammond has raised some fundamental questions: Does this elaborate system of committees, checklists, public hearings, and political approval yield books that students might want to curl up in bed with? Is there one best way to teach a subject, and does the state always know what it is? If politicians, administrators, technocrats, and special interest groups like the books, but the students won't read them, or can't remember what they read, is the system doing what it is supposed to do?

Hugs and Pragmatism on a Proclamation Committee

Before the passage of H.B. 885, Texas Education Agency officials determined among themselves what kind of directives would be issued to textbook publishers. Initially, they opposed Hammond's plan to create Proclamation Committees composed of Board-appointed representatives from around the state. Their opposition was based on fears that a Board-appointed committee would be too "political" and might not be representative of the state's ethnic diversity. After Hammond's bill passed, though, the TEA mounted a pilot project to test out the new approach before the law takes effect in 1991.

The pilot severely tested the new approach because its task was to set specifications for basal readers, and reading instruction is once again a national battleground between the advocates of phonics instruction and advocates of the "whole language" approach. As in past wars over reading instruction, the issue has become highly politicized, which "conservatives" lining up behind "phonics," and "liberals" pushing "whole language."

Dr. Victoria Bergin, Deputy Commissioner for Curriculum and Program Development and chairperson of the Proclamation Committee on reading, was relieved when the Board-appointed Committee "just happened to have good ethnic and gender representation." Even though some of the members came with particular philosophies, Bergin noted, the teacher majority on the Committee moderated those whose views were based on either politics or academic theory. Bergin praised the teachers on the committee for their "practicality and vision." "In the end," said Bergin, "the theoreticians had to bow to the experience of classroom teachers."

Classroom teachers were dissatisfied with traditional basal readers, which they found to be boring and too broken up with skills and pictures. They criticized publishers for giving lip service to various approaches, but not doing any one thing systematically and well. According to Bergin, Texas will call for basal readers that teach phonics to beginning readers, but not to a point of diminishing returns. Texas will give young children kits that include libraries of small books and tapes containing classic stories. In recognition of the fact that most teachers use their basal readers like a Bible, and because they will need training before they can switch successfully to a new format, the Committee retained the traditional textbook format for the upper elementary grades. But the new basal readers will feature fewer short excerpts, longer segments of challenging text, better literature, and a more authentic approach to ethnicity.

"When it was over, the members of the committee were jumping up and down with glee and hugging each other," says Bergin, who now believes that the new committee system with teacher majorities will be good for Texas. And Bill Hammond is gratified that the new law seems to be working as he intended it to.

The crack in the system that Hammond has opened up will probably widen as the Edgewood school finance equalization decision begins to embolden school districts and teachers who have been, thus far, hostage to the state textbook money pot and structurally removed from important decisions about textbooks. They may begin to assert themselves, as did the teachers on the pilot Proclamation Committee on reading.

ELEGANCE, FADDISM, AND CORRUPTION IN CALIFORNIA: WHY THE LEGISLATURE CHANGED THE ADOPTION SYSTEM

Author's note: The reader is advised that the author was not a disinterested observer of the events described below. She became a registered lobbyist in California, initially on behalf of the Council for Basic Education, in order to support Senate Bill 594, which proposed substantial changes in the textbook adoption process. When the Council withdrew its support, she re-registered on behalf of an organization she formed, Citizens for Local Choice, in order to continue her activities on behalf of the bill. An amended version of the bill was approved in both houses of the California legislature in September 1989 without a dissenting vote, and was signed into law by California's Governor George Deukmejian in October.

Senate Bill 594 was introduced to the California Senate in February, 1989, by Senator Ken Maddy (R-Fresno), who enjoys the respect of his colleagues on both sides of the aisle. The bill, as originally written, aroused stiff resistance from State Superintendent Bill Honig, the State Board of Education, the State Curriculum Commission, and Columbia University's Diane Ravitch, who co-authored California's new curriculum framework for history and social studies. This portrait of a state in transition explores two questions: Why did the California legislature change California's textbook adoption system, which had achieved so much national acclaim? How could a bill, so vigorously resisted by the educational establishment of California, have passed both houses of the legislature without a single dissenting vote?

At the heart of the resistance was Honig's expressed concern that the Maddy bill would reduce California's power to force publishers to produce "quality" books. And in a series of op-ed pieces in California newspapers, it became clear that Diane Ravitch of Columbia, co-author of the acclaimed history/social studies framework, was concerned about a reduction in the state's power to insist on high quality materials to match the framework. Through a series of op-ed pieces in California newspapers, Ravitch portrayed S.B. 594 as a "publisher" bill (partly true), and portrayed the publishers as opponents of "quality."

After many rounds of negotiations and modifications, S.B. 594 became law in October, 1989. It's most prominent feature is a "rolling adoption" process, which allows publishers to submit textbooks at least every two years (rather than every seven years--a practice initiated by Honig). State textbook adoption officials will organize subject-matter panels to review the books, and determine whether the books will be placed on the state's list of approved textbooks. Under the rolling adoption system, California can update its book list more frequently, taking advantage of new good books, and dropping books from the list as better ones become available. Under the new system, publishers can take as much time as they need to develop and field-test materials before submission. Under the old system, publishers were given only a year (later lengthened to two years) to develop an entire K-8 textbook system (and all its associated extras) to match California's curriculum. Under those time pressures, publishers often cut corners on quality in order to meet the submission deadline. Failure to meet this hectic timetable meant that the publisher would be locked out of the competition for another seven years.

Under the old system, California education officials could require rejected publishers--if they wanted to stay in the game--to revise their books in a few months time--a practice that produced some sloppy textbooks. Under the new system, publishers of books found to be deficient can take their time with revisions and re-submit the books two years later.

The Maddy bill gives teachers more voice in the state textbook selection process requiring that seven of the 16 members of the state's Curriculum Commission be working teachers. In addition, the bill contains tougher conflict-of-interest provisions than the previous law. In spirit, if not in words, the bill encourages the state to give teachers a wider array of textbook choices, but leaves state education officials the freedom to define the boundaries of that freedom.

Too Much Competition Over the Wrong Issues

To many legislators, California's textbook adoption system seemed to be veering off course. California was demanding a custom-made product without giving publishers the advanced deposit typical in custom orders. Thus for the publishers the stakes were very high, and getting higher with each passing adoption contest as California sought to define evermore distinctive curricula.

At the same time, a publisher with the necessary capital and willingness to risk it, and who earnestly tried to meet California's demands, could not assume that his efforts would be crowned with success. It soon became clear to the publishers that there was an increasingly fragile connection between efforts and rewards. The state could abruptly change its adoption criteria after a publisher had already invested millions in the previously announced criteria. A company caught in this downdraft could go under, or become a target for an unfriendly takeover. Publishers with big entertainment budgets, or close ties to school officials, often seemed more successful than publishers who kept their noses to the grindstone.

Although California demanded "excellence," California's selection process has not been any better equipped to recognize excellence than it is elsewhere. When hoards of volunteer reviewers, on a short time schedule, tried to apply cumbersome checklists to mountains of materials, the results were unpredictable at best, and bizarre at worst. It was plain to most observers that publishers, in their desperation to win adoptions (and thus to avoid a financial disaster that might result in the company's demise) were resorting to strategies that seemed better correlated with success than careful writing, editing, and field testing. It was no secret in Sacramento, and elsewhere, that publishers were wining and dining state and local officials at a furious pace. And as the cost of doing business in California escalated, only the largest publishers seemed willing and able to enter the market.

There were persistent rumors of kickbacks to state board members and of clandestine relationships between state bureaucrats and publishers. Local school officials, who decide which books on the state list they will buy, sensed the

publishers' desperation and took advantage of it. Rumors, which would later become elevated to allegations in the San Francisco Chronicle, had it that school district officials were increasingly receptive to free-spending publisher representatives.

Senator Maddy's supporters in the legislature were miffed that California's school officials were ignoring the existing law, which called for textbooks to be adopted every two years. They noticed that two successful adoptions did not occur on schedule, and heard from irritated teachers about delays in the scheduled purchase of new books. Other teachers were outraged when the state tried to control not only content, but pedagogy as well, and they said so to their elected representatives.

In addition, legislators who were searching for funds for AIDS, the medically indigent, and the homeless, were powerfully annoyed when they discovered that Honig had locked up much of their discretionary money when he won voter support for Proposition 98. That ballot proposition earmarked a fixed percentage of state revenues for education, and garnered the state educational system an estimated $400 million in 1988-89, and $600 million in 1989-90. In the face of all that, Honig was still asking the legislature for more money, and some legislators expressed a desire to let some air out of Honig's tires.

Publishers expressed their displeasure when Honig solicited contributions from the publishers for his drive to pass a statewide initiative he favored--a solicitation they dared not refuse. Publishers engaged in corrupt practices complained about other publishers who were doing the same thing, and about school officials who were extorting favors in exchange for sales. In general, members of the legislature were getting alarmed about a process that seemed to be getting out of hand.

Initially, the biggest publishing houses--the ones with an inside track in California--opposed Senator Maddy's bill. But after reviewing the issue, they became convinced that they would look silly, as entrepreneurs, if they opposed a bill to expand the competition. As the bill rolled through the legislative process, it picked up support from the California School Boards Association, which was restive over the top-down controls imposed by the state. The Council for Basic Education joined the coalition to support the idea of rolling adoption (although it subsequently repudiated its support). When Maddy included more teacher slots on the Curriculum Commission, he acquired the support of the California Teachers Association. The California Federation of Teachers has supported the bill from the beginning.

Despite broad support for the bill, the resistance from Honig, his staff, the State Board of Education, and the Curriculum Commission was formidable. Honig had made the curriculum framework/textbook adoption system the centerpiece of his educational reform efforts, and had achieved national acclaim for his efforts.

He made headlines around the nation in 1985 when he announced that the state's rejection of all science textbooks, and again in 1986 when announced the rejection of all math books because they didn't teach children to think. In educational magazines and journals, and in daily newspapers, and in the State

Departments press releases, these celebrated rejections are repeated endlessly as illustrations of educational reform in California, and as instances of Honig's courage in standing up to creationists or the publishers. In order to understand why, in the face of all that, the legislature so resoundingly rebuffed Honig and the State Board, some details from recent history are necessary.

New Curricula, New Textbooks

Over the past seven years, California has created a series of basic curricular reforms. If the curriculum "frameworks" developed under Honig's leadership are judged by standards of disciplinary integrity, cultural richness, and the willingness to incorporate state-of-the-art research on how children learn, any fair-minded observer would conclude that they have been very successful. When they are compared to curriculum documents produced by other states (even states like New York with a reputation for scholastic rigor), California's frameworks are brilliant.

Another major element in Honig's reform plan was his intention to use the state's considerable leverage to call forth textbooks that matched its curricular frameworks. Six years ago, nearly all the adoption states were on a "beat Texas" kick, and for good reasons. Texas had the largest market share (California now occupies that position), the most prescriptive "calls" to publishers, and the most tightly centralized purchasing system. It could make publishers jump through hoops in order to get a share of the most lucrative market.

That by itself was enough to make most state superintendents jealous, especially those from other adoption states. What was worse, everybody was stuck with the books Texas demanded, and Texas distorted the books in ways that raised ideological and pedagogical hackles elsewhere, especially in California. There were reading books without literary merit, biology books without evolution, math books that didn't expect students to think, and American history books without either controversy or style.

Honig was determined to segment the monolithic textbook market, thereby creating an alternative to the standard, national textbook dominated by Texas. By asking for textbooks that were entirely different from what Texas wanted, Honig intended to test out the publishers' dicta that they couldn't make a profit by writing a book for just one state--even California. He hoped to make them choose between investing in the large and growing California market, and investing in Texas and the rest of the U.S. More grandly, he hoped to provide the entire nation with excellent textbooks.

But Honig was saddled with a textbook adoption system that reflected some of the silliest excesses of the 1960s and 1970s. Before books could even be considered on their educational and pedagogical merits, they had to be approved by a state-level committee that was a Noah's Ark of special interest group representatives. There were horror stories, for example, about California rejecting books that mentioned ice cream and cake (considered junk food by the health food lobby). Thus California was also producing strange distortions in textbooks, and state education leaders were acutely embarrassed. Without disrupting the Compliance Committee, Honig gracefully moderated its way of

interpreting the criteria for a textbook's treatment of minorities, women, the elderly, the handicapped, animals, the environment, and nutrition.

Standing Up For Evolution: Reality or Illusion?

In 1983, California modified its life science curriculum for middle-grade students and called for textbooks to match. In October of 1985, Honig made his first big splash in the great textbook pond: he announced that none of the books measured up to California's standards. He summoned some of California's leading scientists to support his conclusion that the books didn't deal adequately with organic evolution, human reproduction, and ethical issues in science (such as acid rain). The publishers were told in no uncertain terms that they must revise their books--in two months time--if they expected to sell them in California.

The revision process ordered by the State Board was delegated to a six-member Science Subject Matter Committee of the Curriculum Commission. None of the six were biologists. Instead of asking publishers to correct errors, it merely asked them to add new material giving the scientific evidence that supports the theory of evolution. It did not require that the new material be consistent with the old. In November, the SSMC accepted the revisions proposed by the publishers and recommended the adoption of all the nominally revised books.

On December 12, the Board of Education held a public hearing on the science book adoption, where it was surprised by an outpouring of scientists with a great deal to say about the revision process and the books it had produced. On the hottest topic of the evening--evolution--most of the scientists testified that the books still contained the same old evasions, obfuscations, and errors that publishers have used for decades to placate the creationists. One scientist brandished a dinosaur bone to refute textbook language suggesting that dinosaurs were merely creatures that "some scientists believed" in.

On other topics as well, the witnesses cited numerous and important factual errors that the non-biologists on the SSMC had failed to notice. But on the following day, December 13, the full Board voted to accept the committee's recommendations and adopted all the books anyway. Few newspapers outside of California covered the sequel to Honig's widely-publicized rejection of the books, and thus most of the nation was left with the impression that California had struck a blow for scientific integrity.

The Math Adoption, and Its Bitter Aftermath

One small textbook company, Open Court, had pioneered in the 1970's with a conceptual approach to elementary math instruction. In one California district, Open Court's Real Math series has been used for some years and students have made noticeable progress in math. Elsewhere in California, though, students answers on math tests revealed their incapacity to think about what they were doing. For example, only 52% of 8th graders in 1986 correctly answered the question: What is 100 percent of 32?. Thus in 1985, when California reworked its mathematics curriculum in preparation for the 1986 math textbook adoption, it modelled its approach on the Open Court method, and on the recently published

standards of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. The new approach stressed math skills appropriate to current needs of the workplace (for example, number sense, the application of math to real world problems, and the skill of estimation) The pedagogy stressed the use of manipulative materials such a rulers and calculators to help students make the connection between paper-and-pencil math and the physical world.

With only a year to develop a complete set of K-8 books, a few other publishers took California at its word and invested millions in the development of books to match the state's guidelines. A few others hedged their bets. Fearing that pressures from teachers would force the state to backtrack on the new approach, they tried to make just enough change to satisfy California's state officials, but retained enough of the traditional approach to appeal to teachers.

The State Department organized an excellent adoption process. Out of the most qualified applicants, it selected three panels to review the books. The reviewers were trained by a nationally acclaimed math educator, and instructed to apply the state's new criteria stringently to their assessment of the books. On those instructions, all three panels independently and unanimously voted to adopt only one textbook series, Open Court's Real Math, which was hardly surprising since the framework had been modelled on that approach in the first place.

By the time the Curriculum Commission received the panels' recommendation, the other publishers had vented their fury. Laidlaw, which had risked a big investment in California's framework, was outraged. Publishers of traditional math books argued that teachers ought to be given a choice. School districts that preferred the traditional approach, or didn't think their teachers could make a successful shift without a lot of training, also beat a path to the Board.

The Board then rejected all the books, including Open Court, and Honig announced to the press that none of the books measured up to California's high standards. The publishers were instructed to comply with a revision process projected to last an entire year. A few companies dropped out of competition at that point, either because they couldn't tolerate another year with no return on their investment, or because they thought they would be throwing good money after bad if they invested still more money in such a capricious process.

Those that stayed in the game endured painful, protracted editing-by-committee process that operated on an entirely new set of rules. The revision work was under the direction of state agency specialists and political appointees, none of whom had taught elementary math. Some publishers were offended when they were required to make revisions that were either inconsistent with the rest of the book, or merely silly. While the math books that emerged from the process were an improvement on the existing "national edition" books on the market, the whole affair soured relations between the state and the publishers, and some decided at that point to avoid the California market in the future.

The Reading Adoption of 1988

The adoption of reading/language arts and English books in 1988 was even more raucous and nasty than the math and science adoptions that preceded it. The contest was marred by a last-minute shift in the state's reading philosophy, by appearances of conflict-of-interest, and by a selection process that seemed flawed at best, and corrupt at worst. Honig again achieved national acclaim when he announced a new philosophy of reading instruction which opposed the "dumbing down" of children's stories and took a forthright stand in favor of good literature. California newspapers blared headlines such as "Dick and Jane Meet the Classics," "Battling Boring Books," and "California Dropping Dick and Jane."

The State Department's July 1988 press release on the Curriculum Commissions' recommendations for reading and language arts textbooks was titled "No More Low-Cal Literature for California." The state had "once again sent a clear message to the nation's publishers to keep up with the educational reform movement." "These recommendations give us books with "real literature--with real values and ideas--not soft, shallow children's stories," said Honig.

Amid the general celebration of good literature, though, there was a less publicized battle over reading pedagogy. In developing its English-Language Arts Framework in 1986, California had sought the advice of experts from the Center for the Study of Reading, a federally-funded research center. The framework, when read literally, was squarely based on the Center's synthesis of research on reading, which called for a sound foundation in phonics in the early grades and a rich diet of good literature at all levels.

But the Center's synthesis of competing theories was already falling apart, and the reading pendulum was swinging wildly again. The "Whole Language" movement was sweeping the state. In the minds of many California reading supervisors, a phonics-based program was associated with basal readers that bored kids to death with deadly skill-and-drill exercises and vapid little stories. The Whole Language movement also appealed to many teachers because it spoke of "teacher empowerment" to people who had been forced into cookbook teaching by overly prescriptive teacher manuals. They were swept up in a movement which was as much anti-phonics as it was pro-good literature. And it became evident the key officials in the state agency were sympathetic to the movement. Between the publication of the framework in 1986 and the reading adoption in 1988, the philosophical ground had shifted.

The Instructional Materials Evaluation Panels--the first level of review--were trained for only three days to perform a task that was unbearably complex (although it should be said that three days is more than most textbook reviewers around the nation receive). They had to evaluate books in several categories, the categories were not mutually exclusive, and some publishers complicated the task by submitting the same books in more than one category. Even when armed with definitions of the distinctions between kinds of reading systems, the reviewers evidently had difficulty applying those definitions to actual books because the preliminary evaluations were wildly inconsistent. Agency officials summarily collapsed all the categories, and the publishers who had played by

the rules cried foul. Also, those who had submitted spelling books (one of the categories) found that all books were rejected, ostensibly because they were all deficient. The more likely reason, though, was that the Whole Language philosophy vigorously opposed any teaching of spelling out of context.

One publisher, Open Court, had long stood out from the pack because it used untrammelled children's literature and featured stories rich in cultural content. But it was also known as the only reading series with a strong phonics program for beginning readers. Although the framework called for phonics, the anti-phonics forces on the review panels gave Open Court low ratings on literary quality.

Stunned by being faulted on its best feature, and already stung when its clear-cut victory in the math adoption had been snatched away by the Board, Open Court fought back. The company challenged outright errors on reviewers' evaluation sheets (later acknowledged to be errors by state agency officials), and summoned testimony from leaders in the reading field. Robert Calfee, a Stanford University professor and reading specialist, told the San Jose Mercury that he had reviewed all the primary readers, finding their stories "thin and uninteresting," and concurred with other experts that Open Court's books appear to have been penalized for the publishers strong reputation for phonics instruction. "I'm not here promoting Open Court," said Calfee. "It just seems unfair."

On July 29, 1988 (two days after the panels' preliminary recommendations had been released) Andre Carus of Open Court told the Wall Street Journal that Honig had recently solicited contributions from the publishers for his ballot proposition drive. "Some people in the industry think "that Harcourt's (Harcourt, Brace, Jovonovitch) getting three series (on the list) was a result of their giving a $50,000 contribution."

Honig hotly denied having anything to do with the selection process and accused the publishers of trying to divert attention away from their own shortcomings. Although Honig, as an elected official, had not violated the law, and though nobody thought he had rigged the evaluations, many observers nevertheless thought it improper for the State Superintendent to be soliciting contributions from vendors in the midst of a hot competition for contracts.

Houghton-Mifflin had a better ear to the ground. It produced a reading series that was packaged with collections of "trade books" (real books) of literary merit. Following the dicta of the Whole Language movement that children will learn to read best if they are given good things to read, the program included no skills teaching. Houghton-Mifflin not only won a spot on the adoption list, but has subsequently swept the state, taking an estimated fifty percent of the market.

Maxine Waters, a prominent legislator and a leader in the then-current Jesse Jackson campaign for the Presidency, asked the State Board to approve--on behalf of Los Angeles-- Connections, a skill-and-drill reading series Even though the series was antithetical to California's framework, and even more antithetical to the emerging Whole Language approach, the Board responded to Water's political weight and put the series on the list.

Silver Burdett and Ginn, publisher of a very popular new reading series, chose not to rush the developme[nt] of its new reading series in order to meet California's deadline, and th[ey] reduce didn't compete. After the adoption decisions were made, several la[rge] California school districts appealed to the State Board for waivers which [would] allow them to buy Silver's books. The publishers who had taken the [trouble] to get on the list vigorously opposed waivers for a rival company. All[but] with reservations, the Board went along with the districts seeking waivers.

To many observers, the fi[nal] results were confusing, at best, and enraging at worst. Eight complete pro[grams] had been approved, and 7 other partial programs got the nod. Thus the [publishers who were hoping for a short list (and less competition) were unhappy. The state appeared to have chosen some books that were at odds with its publi[shed] criteria, and rejected books that conformed. Therefore those who had prepared [books] especially for California were angry, and became angrier when two series [not] recommended by the panels got on the list through the political route, and [a] number of districts got waivers for off-list books. Los Angeles was angry b[ecause] it was not allowed to buy spelling books. One author whose series was r[ejected] (Seigfried Englemann, senior author of Distar), filed a lawsuit, and [at] this writing, a lower court has ruled in his favor on procedural grounds.

Teachers were expressing [dismay] over the abrupt changes in math and reading pedagogy, with little or no in-service training to help them turn such sharp corners. School district lead[ers] were beginning to grumble that their test scores would drop dramatically [in] the coming year (they did, in fact) because the state was still using tests [keyed] to the old pedagogy. In the view of many legislators, it appeared that t[extbook] adoption in California had gotten out of hand.

The "Chronicle" Exposes Corrupt[ion]

On April 28, 1989, as b[oth] houses of the California legislature were considering changes in the adopt[ion] system, the San Francisco Chronicle launched a series of articles about corru[ption] in California's textbook system. Chronicle staff writers Angie Cannon and M[ichael] Taylor opened the series with these words: "The system that provides text[books] for millions of California schoolchildren is riddled with conflicts of [interest] and questionable sales practices that appear to violate state law. F[ree-spending salesmen treat educators to lavish meals, sunset cruises, or golf [weekends at posh resorts to influence their final decisions about textbook purcha[ses.]" In some districts, educators with stronger ethics reported their refusal t[o accept free entertainment or even free books. But a number of big districts we[re said to accept rebates--or else they demanded them--in exchange for buying a [particular company's books. According to the Chronicle, some school distric[ts insisted that publishers provide "free" in-service training for teachers, [or kick in contributions to the district's in-service training fund as a quid [pro quo] for doing business in the district.

But the Chronicle series [also] reported corrupting influences at the state level. A State Board member [was] alleged to champion books published by one publisher, and to have given ins[ide] information to the company's Western regional

manager. Publisher representatives were said to "help" members of review panels by filling out their rating sheets for them. "Publishing salesmen and managers also say they actively push their own candidates, often long-time friends in the educational system, to be members of these critical evaluation panels. In some cases, the vending of key evaluators begins years before the state's formal selection process," wrote Lemann and Taylor.

In the wake of the exposes, parent leaders expressed their outrage at educators who could choose their children's books on any basis other than merit. Bill Honig, Senator Larry Stirling (R-San Diego), and Assemblyman Ellis Harris (D-Oakland) immediately called for investigations. As of November, 1989, several official investigations were underway.

Although Maddy's bill had not been designed to correct the abuses reported in the Chronicle ("We don't know how to do that yet," said Maddy at a press conference), the timing of the articles consolidated support for the bill, which at least strengthened minimal legal standards for conflict-of-interest. Soon afterwards, Honig himself dropped his opposition to the Maddy bill after negotiating away some of its more irritating features, and the bill passed both the Senate and Assembly in September of 1989, and was signed into law in October. It took effect in January of 1990, although agency officials are now claiming they are powerless to implement the law because the legislature failed to provide funding.

Nothing Exceeds Like Excess

The excellence of California's curricular reforms has gone apace. Yet in the view of most outside observers, the textbook reform initiative has foundered on bureaucratic complexity and a selection process that has been too political and too superficial. Even if California is "right" about its avant guard curricula, there is still a possibility that the state has made too many radical changes in too short a time. And what is "right" in the view of state officials may not be right for every classroom in a state as culturally diverse as California.

Although the dwindling number of textbook publishers is primarily the result of the takeover mania now afflicting all of American business, California's bull-in-the-china-shop approach has also contributed to the reduction in the number of textbook companies. The sudden demise of Laidlaw can be directly attributed to its failed gamble on California's math framework, and Open Court is hanging by a thread. The caprices and abuses in California's textbook selection process have evidently discouraged the remaining publishers (down now to about six major companies) from entering the California market. As of November, 1989, only two publishers are known to be preparing materials for the state's history/social studies framework, scheduled to be adopted this year.

Honig and his supporters have shrugged off this fact by saying that the publishers "just don't want to produce quality materials," but the evidence suggests that the combination of high stakes and an unpredictable selection process has driven some publishers out of the market, and others out of business.

Honig's highly effective press releases have led many journalists to report that California leads the nation in curriculum development and that the excellent textbooks it has leveraged are improving education in the other 49 states. Yet the evidence suggests otherwise. In science, California and the books it sponsors are no less plagued by fundamentalist influences than Texas. California's math books have not sold very well elsewhere, probably because most states are approaching the change slowly, rather than abruptly. The Houghton-Mifflin literature-based reading series, though highly successful in California, is not selling elsewhere, although its more conventional reading series is.

A New Start

Under the new law, California's educational officials have an opportunity to create a textbook selection system which is knowledge-based and less subject to political, economic, and ideological manipulation. The presence of more teachers in the process will probably moderate California's tendency toward faddish excess and too-rapid change. If the selection process is constructed more carefully, California can tighten the connection between what it says it wants and what it actually buys. If that happens, publishers can be expected to put more of their treasure and talent into careful textbook development and less into lobbying.

Under a rolling adoption process, the State Department and Board can organize a more careful evaluation system. Standing subject-matter panels will not be overwhelmed by a mountain of materials every seven years; they can focus thoughtfully on a small number of books every two years. The state will not have to approve five books unless there are five good ones; the books can be judged against an absolute, rather than a relative standard. The state can capture new knowledge as it becomes available rather than waiting seven years for the next round of adoptions.

If districts know that new and better books may be available in subsequent years, publishers will have more incentive to develop books that will stand the test of time. Rather than engaging in a corner-cutting scramble to meet a submission deadline that occurs only once in seven years, they can enter the market every two years when their books have been thoroughly refined through field testing. Under these conditions, more publishers will probably compete, especially smaller, more innovative publishers that have been driven out of the competition by the high cost of doing business in California.

Under a rolling adoption, the political heat will be turned down to a simmer. There will not be any one moment when politicians can "run against the publishers" or publicly castigate their products, and that will probably lead to more co-operative relationships between the publishers and the state. Books that don't measure up can be revised through quiet negotiations on a two-year schedule. Corruption at the state level is less likely to occur because there will not be any one moment in time when the publishers are pitted against one another in a do-or-die contest.

If the spirit of the Eddy bill is observed, California can provide teachers with a broader array of textbooks, and thus empower them to make professional choices on the basis of their particular students' needs and their own teaching styles. If any lesson is to be learned by the educational reform movement around the nation, it is that teachers need to be given more autonomy in meeting state and school district goals for students. Without that autonomy, able young people are unlikely to go into teaching.

Although California deserves much credit for leveraging a batch of "thinking math" books, for promoting publishers to write better stories for young children, and for climbing out of the dismal swamp of the social studies, it is too early to know whether California's top-down approach, and its reliance on textbooks as a primary reform vehicle, will improve teaching and learning. The jury is still out.

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